

Call it composure, poise or dignity, leaders who have the ability to lead under pressure garner more respect and followership. This is not to imply that a display of emotions is not valuable—it absolutely is. The focus of this overview is to create awareness of the difference between responding constructively or destructively with emotional reactions. And how each choice creates or detracts from trust.

Emotional triggers consist of thoughts, feelings, and events that seem to “trigger” an automatic response from us.

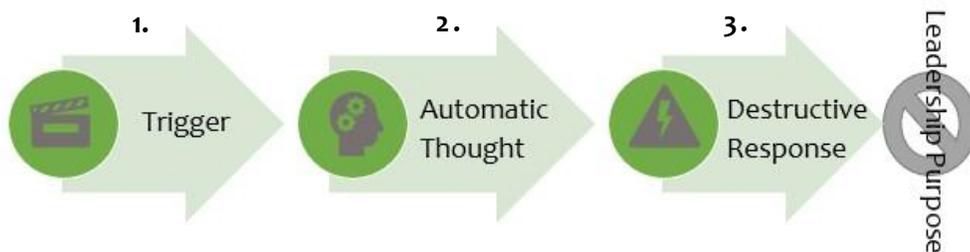
The word “trigger” is important here because the idea is that our *reaction* occurs automatically. It might seem as if the emotional reaction is completely involuntary.

The truth is that this *reaction*, like everything else that we do, is a *choice*. Learning how to identify our personal emotional triggers is the first step to taking control over how we choose to *respond*.

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Let’s explore this by way of several examples.

EXAMPLE: Getting Triggered



1. Trigger:

Team member complains openly and has negative body language (eye rolling, heavy sighs, crossed arms) during a staff meeting about an upcoming change to an important process.

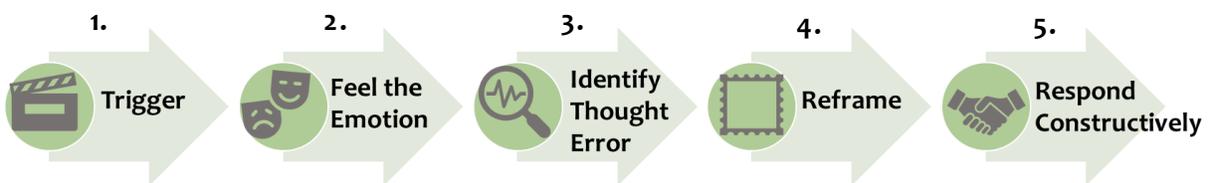
2. Automatic Thought(s):

“Why do you always have to be the nay-sayer? You are always so negative! What is wrong with you? You could have a positive impact on this team.”

3. Destructive Response(s):

Ignore the interruption. Or get visibly frustrated with her. Try to convince her why this change is needed. Get flustered and get off course on my planned meeting agenda. Leave meeting unsettled and mad at her (and me!).

EXAMPLE: Not Getting “Triggered” (Maintaining Composure)



1. Trigger:

Team member complains openly and has negative body language (eye rolling, heavy sighs, crossed arms) during a staff meeting about an upcoming change to an important process.

2. Feel the emotion:

I feel my face flush, my heart races a bit, I feel anxious.

3. Identify the Thought Error:

“Why do you always have to be the nay-sayer? You are always so negative! What is wrong with you? You could have a positive impact on this team.”

When I think this thought, I realize it is causing my anxiety. I can choose to think differently in order to be composed.

4. Reframe:

- What are the facts? We've had 3 big changes in 6 months. This is a core process to her job. She is very experienced relative to the rest of the team.
- Am I exaggerating? Yes, I am. She is not *always* negative, and she is frequently immensely helpful with the team because of her tenure and experience.
- What might be another explanation for this situation? She's frustrated. This will impact her job which she is particularly good at, she might be anxious about another change. She's probably also upset that she wasn't involved in the change process.

5. Respond Constructively:

Remain calm and composed. Thank her for openly sharing her concerns in the meeting (after all, she could complain and sabotage outside of the meeting!). Ask questions to understand her concerns. Resolve them honestly and directly. Ask for her support. If she still is resistant, set up a time to discuss one on one.



Self-Reflection

When was the last time you were triggered at work?

What caused it and how did you react?

Do you see patterns in what things seem to trigger you?

What can you do to strengthen your automatic reactions to triggers?

